



Europe for journalists

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EUROBAROMETER: An important survey on racism and xenophobia

Europeans say "yes" to democracy but living with "others" is less welcome.

For 78% of Europeans democracy remains the best of regimes, come what may, and for 60% of them respect for human rights is a very worthwhile cause. These are among the main findings of a survey on racism and xenophobia carried out by the Commission of the European Communities in October and November 1988 and published recently.

But the European Community nevertheless must remain vigilant. If eight Europeans out of 10 are firmly committed to democracy, in three EC countries more than one in 10 believes that dictatorship might be a solution: Belgium (11%), Germany (11%) and Italy (13%).

The survey also shows that eight Europeans out of 10 disapprove of racist movements. Their views on these movements obviously are linked to their commitment to democracy.

In order to assess the opinions of Europeans on racism and xenophobia, it is necessary to begin by defining what is meant by "the others". The answers vary, depending in whether the viewpoint is nationality, race or religion.

At the level of nationality, "others" for the Belgians mean mainly North Africans, Turks, other Europeans and Europeans from southern Europe. The Germans put Turks at the head of their list, followed by Europeans from southern Europe. The Danes, French and Dutch generally single out non-European populations.

The Greeks, Spaniards, Irish, Italians and Portuguese, who have smaller immigrant populations to cope with, find it more difficult to identify a non-national and tend to regard European nationals as "others". The Luxemburgers, who are hosts to a very large number of people from other European countries, tend to put people from southern Europe in this category.

As for the "other race" the most common spontaneous answer in all European countries, except Britain and France, is to regard blacks as the "other race". In Britain it tends to be Indians and in France the Arabs.

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The "other religion", at the Community level, is clearly Islam. It is mentioned by more than half those polled in Belgium and by more than seven out of 10 in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. Ireland is an exception here: for six people out of 10 the "others" are Protestants. In the other European countries there is a fairly wide spread, especially in Britain, Italy and Greece, while in Spain and Portugal in particular more people found it hard to answer this question.

How are relations between the Community's citizens and "the others"? The survey is full of lessons in this connection:

- One European in three believes there are too many people of another nationality or race in his country;
- Few of the Europeans who were polled claimed they mix with "the others" in their neighbourhood or regard them as friends, despite the fact that one European in three is in contact with a person of a different nationality because of his job;
- However, regardless of the category referred to, a large majority of Europeans claims to have no problem in living alongside "the others";
- For nearly one European out of every two the presence of immigrants in his country is a rather positive factor for the future, although a considerable minority of those polled held the opposite view;
- Europeans are well disposed, by and large, to suggestions to improve relations between nationals and non-nationals; and
- one European in three would like to see the adoption of Community-wide legislation on relations with non-nationals residing in Member States. One in five, however, wants each Member State to be free to legislate in this matter.

The immigrant problem facing some EC countries is not an indication that their citizens reject democratic principles and values. On the contrary, three Europeans out of four are in favour of improving, or at least maintaining, the rights of immigrants. What is more, they count on the European Community to do this.

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It is now up to the European Institutions to take appropriate measures in the field of integration and tolerance of people with different nationality, race, religion and culture, taking the direction indicated by the opinion of the majority of Europeans.

ENVIRONMENT: The Community declares war on pollution

The European Commission launches two environmental protection programmes.

The European Commission has decided to give a lead to the 320 million Community citizens for whom environmental problems are becoming increasingly important. It has just launched two environmental protection programmes, the first of which should be operational from next year.

This is the ENVIREG programme, intended mainly to combat pollution at sea, at a cost to the Community budget of some ECU 500mn.*. With factories dumping their waste into the sea, cities their sewage and tankers the dregs from their holds, the seas are becoming heavily polluted.

ENVIREG will tackle these problems at their root. It will help Member States build water treatment plants in cities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants and equip ports with the necessary cleaning facilities for tankers. ENVIREG will also help with the treatment of toxic and dangerous industrial waste.

The second programme, MEDSPA, will complement the first. With a budget of ECU 37mn., it will finance pilot projects in regions not covered by ENVIREG and in third countries. As pollution knows no frontiers, it would be ridiculous to limit the war in pollution in the Mediterranean to only the Community countries. MEDSPA must be formally approved by the Twelve before it can be launched.

These two Community programmes may be no more than the proverbial drop in the ocean; even so, they are concrete activities which, if multiplied, could well clean up the seas.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.73 or IR£0.77.

ENVIRONMENT: Regulating the transport of radioactive waste

The European Commission is proposing a directive aimed at controlling the transport of radioactive waste throughout the Community.

An end to the uncontrolled transport of hazardous waste within the 12-nation European Community is the aim of a directive which the European Commission has just sent the EC Council of Ministers. Under the provisions of the projected directive, every consignment of radioactive waste would have to be notified to the competent authorities in the country of destination; its transport could not take place until the latter had authorized it. What is more, authorization would be given only when the authorities had sufficient proof that those taking delivery of the waste were capable of dealing with it properly. The Commission also favours the use of a uniform document at every stage of the procedure.

For Commissioner Ripa di Meana, who has responsibility for environmental issues, it is a question of introducing strict controls on the transport of hazardous waste to ensure that "disquieting episodes, such as the Transnuklear/Mol affair, do not happen in the future". This particular scandal involved the transport of radioactive waste, which was far more dangerous than the shipping documents made out, from the nuclear centre in Mol (Belgium) to Germany by the German transport company Transnuklear. This event, which made headlines in January 1988 was at the origin of the decision to introduce Community rules for the transport of hazardous waste.

HEALTH: Meeting a nuclear emergency

The Twelve adopt a directive on what to do in the event of a nuclear accident.

How must the 12-nation European Community deal with a nuclear accident like the one which occurred in Chernobyl? As the old adage has it, forewarned is forearmed. It was in this spirit that the EC Council of Ministers recently adopted a directive on the information to be given to the public on the steps, including the necessary protective measures, to be taken in the event of a nuclear emergency.

The directive sets the basic standards for the protection of both the general public and workers against radioactivity. The public as a result will be told beforehand of the dangers and effects of radioactivity and the best means of protecting oneself against them.

Should a veritable emergency arise, the Member States will be required to tell the public of its exact nature and of the protective measures to be taken. Special measures could be envisaged for children, women, the elderly and certain occupations, such as doctors and teachers.

The directive also provides for specialized information to be made available to firemen, military personnel, doctors, nurses and all those engaged in civil protection.

This directive should enable the EC governments to act quickly and in concert in the event of an emergency; at the same time it should prevent a panic reaction among the general public, by advising it on the preventive measures to be taken.

BUDGET: Pan-European collaboration in the fight against fraud

200 experts recommend a penal accord to protect the Community's finances.

To alert national authorities to the problem of the frauds perpetrated at the expense of the Community budget was the aim of the conference organized by the European Commission's legal and audit departments from November 27 to 29. It was attended by more than 200 participants, including magistrates, lawyers and all those taking part in anti-fraud activities at the national as well as Community level.

The national legislation of the individual Member States is generally used to prevent and stamp out violations of the Community's financial regulations. Consequently, Community and national authorities must work closely together if the fight against fraud is to be effective.

During the two-day conference discussion centred on criminal and administrative penalties; the problems faced by judges during investigations into cases of Community fraud; new forms of trans-border fraud, based on computers, and the influence of Community law on national systems of criminal law.

The conference made several suggestions as well as proposals. It proposed that the project for a penal accord to protect Community finances be relaunched and called for closer collaboration between judges from the different Member States.

The proceedings of the conference will be studied by the European Commission for a detailed examination of the necessary measures. The first concrete decisions are expected early next year.

AUDIOVISUAL POLICY: The challenge of films and television programmes

The European Commission wants to strengthen the MEDIA 92 action programme.

What will our television and cinema screens show in 1992? The caricature of the European viewer, mesmerized by American films and programmes, viewed on a Japanese television set, is probably on the way out. European high-definition television (HDTV) is making rapid technical progress; it could provide us quality sound and image, if it is adopted as the world standard. To strengthen its chances, the Twelve have adopted the ground rules needed for a television without frontiers. But a genuine European audiovisual community also requires a Community output of films, television programmes - and videocassettes. Recognizing this, the European Commission called on the Twelve at the end of November to do more to secure the growth of a dynamic European audiovisual industry and to ensure its independence.

The Commission, which plans to submit to the Twelve an overall strategy for the industry at the beginning of 1990, believes that the time has already come to speed up the implementation of the experimental MEDIA programme, which sets out measures to encourage the development of the audiovisual industry.

MEDIA 92, which seeks to end the compartmentalization of the Community's 12 national audiovisual industries, has already made a number of gains. The European film distribution office (EFDO) has facilitated the projection of 25 feature-length films throughout the Community and Switzerland since November 1988 before an audience of some four million. The European organization for an independent market (EURO-AIM) has succeeded in selling several hundred hours of programming, much of it to American and Canadian television networks.

BABEL, the acronym for Broadcasting Across the Barriers of European Language, has made it possible to dub or sub-title 29 films and television serials, from 13 different countries (the EC plus Switzerland), for a total of 60 showings in various European languages. Other activities launched by MEDIA 92, with the financial backing of the European Community, aim at increasing the number of saleable "European" scripts, encouraging cross-border cooperation between animation film studios and helping train promising young professionals. Other activities will see the light of day next year.

INTERNAL MARKET: Some customs practices die hard

Germany held to be in breach of its Community obligations by EC Court of Justice.

The 12-nation European Community is having a hard enough time as it is doing away with checks at its internal borders in time for 1992 and the single market. Its task is being made more difficult, however, because checks which have been eliminated in theory are still being applied in some cases - as some German poultry importers discovered to their cost. They protested to the European Commission, which took the matter to the EC Court of Justice in Luxembourg. The Court ruled on November 28 that the German authorities were in breach of their Community obligations because they required the firms in question to comply with formalities not provided for by Community legislation.

Two German sanitary regulations on poultry require importers of fresh meat from other EC countries to declare the goods before they cross the frontier and indicate when they will be available for veterinary inspection. However, under Community legislation such inspection must not be carried out at the frontier but in the country of export, as the Court had occasion to point out just over a year ago. It has now ruled that to require importers to make a prior declaration, so that illegal checks can be carried out, is all the more contrary to Community rules.

COST OF LIVING: Denmark and Portugal still at opposite ends of the spectrum

Differences within the 12-nation Community remain substantial.

A standard basket of goods and services which cost 100 units in Belgium in September 1989 cost some 136 units in Denmark and just 61 units in Portugal. Prices continue, in other words, to vary considerably from one EC country to another, as the figures published by Eurostat, the Community's statistical office, make clear.

Germany and France remain more expensive than Belgium, while all the other Community countries are cheaper. The basket cost between 95 and 97 units in Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands; 93 units in Britain, 90 in Luxembourg, 82 in Spain and 73 in Greece.